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CHAPTER III

BUDDHIST BAPTISM

THE term baptism as applied to a youth who enters a monastery in the state of probation (called shin) is not, as many people think, a mere idle analogy borrowed from the Christian faith. The novice actually and formally receives a new name to mark his accession to the full dignity of humanity. The great majority of shins, or ko-yins, are little boys of twelve or a little older, but occasionally a man secludes himself from the world at an advanced age. Till a Buddhist has entered the fraternity he cannot claim to be more than a mere animal. He has a lu nāmé, it is true, a worldly name, but so might any ox, or horse, or elephant. It is not till he has subjected himself to the discipline of the kyaung that he can reap the fruits of a holy past and look forward to a more glorious future.

> The devils in the underworlds wear out
> Deeds that were wicked in an age gone by.

Man has less innocence than the animals, and cannot, like them, progress by merely omitting to sin. He may make golden stairways of his weaknesses indeed, but before he can do so he must abandon the world, if it is only for twenty-four hours. Then he becomes an upathaka, a believer, and towards another life will hold the gain as well as answer for the loss in the present one, death casting up the debit or credit.

> Higher than Indra's ye may lift your lot,
> And sink it lower than the worm or gnat.

In recognition of this new-gained power the novice drops

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781 789 Meditation is the only path to the higher seats whereby a man becomes a yahanda, fit for Ne'ban, possessed of the six kinds of wisdom:—

1. The faculty of seeing like a nat or dewa.
2. The faculty of hearing like a nat.
3. Creative power.
4. Knowledge of the thoughts of others.
5. Freedom from passion.
6. Knowledge of one's own past existences.

781 788 [824] They sit therefore for long hours fingering their rosaries, the beads made of the seeds of the *Canna indica*, "Indian shot," which sprang from Shin Gautama's blood, and repeating many times the prescribed formulæ, most often the Thamatawi Patthana—All is changeful, all is sad, all is unreal; followed by the Tharana Gôn, the invocation of the Three Precious Gems, the Lord, the Law, and the Assembly. So by abstraction of the mind they hope to acquire the four laws of Edepat:—

1. Absolute power over the will.
2. Absolute power over the mind.
3. Absolute power of execution.
4. Absolute power over the means to the object.

781 812 The discipline is terrible to all but a slow-minded man, and we can well imagine one who thus presents himself to the people as a living memento of all that is sacred and perfect in the religion, longing for the extinction of Ne'ban, where he may escape from the misery of recurring lives.

> Ask of the sick, the mourners, ask of him
> Who tottereth on his staff, lone and forlorn,
> Liketh thee life? These say, The babe is wise
> That weepeth being born.

792 So each one in the brotherhood passes the time each afternoon: some asleep, some racking the brain with mystical musings, some learning, some teaching, while throughout all sounds the din of the schoolroom, where the pupils are shouting out their tasks at the top of their voices.

Between three and four the lessons are finished, and the shins and scholars perform any domestic duties that may be

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775* 779* "Him I call indeed a Brahmana who .. penetrates to the real, whether in earth, hell or heaven ... a sage, perfected in knowledge."[19] It might seem therefore that growth in science and intellectual acumen would anticipate this experience of perfect knowledge, and there are various descriptions of the bhikku's discipline which indeed suggest a gradual growth towards full realization as life becomes more worthy and intellect more discerning. There are also texts which appear to suggest this more directly. "If lust be abandoned .... to that extent, brahmin, Nibbāna is seen in this life. It is to be realised for themselves by the wise."[20] In the *Dhammapada*, the learned man who drives away vanity by earnestness is described as 'climbing the terraced heights of wisdom' and the bhikku who delights in reflection is close upon Nibbāna.[21] There are passages in which progress seems to be indicated, step by step, including progress from first discernments to higher knowledge and at last to final enlightenment in Nibbāna.

Surely at last we have brought Nibbāna nearer, in this capacity of the trained, persevering intellect? Not only, it would seem, is Nibbāna proclaimed as the goal but some glimpse of the goal itself is vouchsafed to those who are intelligent.

But here we come to the very core of the Buddhist paradox. At the summit of affirmation we are plunged into negation. For Nibbāna is not attained *through* enlightenment. Nibbāna *is* enlightenment. Nibbāna *is* Vision. Only by Vision can it be known and only to Vision can it be fully described. All power short of this Vision is inadequate. Intellect falls short. It is not despised, but neither is it exalted.

We have now to examine the nature and the reference of this negation.

3. *The Buddhist Negation*

[781] 779* 775* 812 Intellect is the busy apprentice of Vision. No one who has studied the exercises in concentration and meditation which form so large a part of the monk's discipline can doubt this function. It is not, indeed, a purely rationalistic function. The zealous Buddhist may be said to seek Nibbāna with all his heart, with all his mind and with all his strength. It is a discipline of the will and the emotions as much as a discipline of the mind. But the schooled, searching intellect certainly figures largely in this approach. There is a minute analysis, an elaborate classification, a sort

[19] *Dhp.* 423. for translation cf. *S.B.E.* X, 1, p. 96 and d'Eypernon, *ibid.*, 175.

[20] *A.* I. 156ff. (*The Book of Gradual Sayings*, Part I, p. 141).

[21] *Dhp.* 28ff. (cf. translation by Mrs. Rhys Davids, *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon*, Part I, p. 13).

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of vivisection of phenomena, tearing existence asunder, piece by piece, until at last no fluttering thread is left to suggest delusive substance or present permanence. The flux is steadily discerned, the complex of intertwining relations displayed, that, through the flux, the mind may see Nibbāna. It is small wonder that Buddhists have claimed that their sages anticipated the methods and objectivity of modern science.

All this preliminary process, however, is negative. In itself it is not Vision. It is the clearing away of confusions to make Vision possible. One is reminded of the relation between patient research and the flash of intuition which has marked the progress of scientific discovery. Buddhists themselves have discussed, as we have seen, whether the resultant Vision should be regarded as enhanced intellectual discernment or distinguished as something radically different.

A glance at one of the mental exercises detailed in the Pali scriptures will illustrate the problem. The object of this exercise, called the Stages of Deliverance,[32] seems to be to deliver the aspirant from any illusion of substantiality in the phenomena around him; to train him to look Beyond. First he is to contemplate the form of his own body, then, unconscious of his own body, he is to contemplate forms exterior to himself. There follows a stage of intentness, dwelling on the thought, "It is fair." The fourth stage is attained "by passing wholly beyond all consciousness of material qualities (or forms), by the dying out of the awareness of sensory reaction, by the unheeding of any awareness of difference." Thus "he enters into that rapt ecstasy which is a consciousness of infinite space." "The idea of the infinity of space is the only idea that is present." Then he leaves space behind and thinks only of the infinity of reason or intellect (viññāṇañcāyatana).[33] Next he dwells on the thought, "Nothing at all exists." Then he "remains in the state of mind to which neither ideas nor the absence of ideas are specifically present, and finally he reaches the stage of mind in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be." Other exercises focus the mind on particular objects in order to realise their impermanence. The discipline involves a resolute effort to look away from and beyond all conditioned existence.

Since Nibbāna Vision is the vision of *unconditioned* reality, it might be considered that such a resolute detachment from conditioned reality as that indicated in the exercises would resolve into Vision, or that Vision might be construed as right direction and enhanced power of intellect. The Lēdi Sayādaw seems to give a qualified support to such an interpretation. "For those whose knowledge has been abundantly trained in the doctrines of the intuitively wise Ariyan philosophers, even their inferential

[32] *D.* II, 111f.; *D.* III. 262f.;
[33] *A.* IV. 306. cf. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, chap. VI, p. 124.